Change that is working for you

Providing a fair deal for Cambridge

The Liberal Democrat manifesto for the 2010 City Council elections

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Liberal Democrats - providing a fair deal for Cambridge

In challenging times, we bring a strong sense of direction, a capability to take difficult decisions and a commitment to fairness.

In this manifesto we renew our **vision for Cambridge** and illustrate steps that we are taking and - with a new mandate from this election - will pursue, to help build that vision through the City Council's leadership.

In facing the uncertain financial climate currently shared by all public organisations, we will fight to protect the **basic services** provided for all citizens of the city, which we have transformed since taking control of the Council 10 years ago.

We will continue to nurture the **future development of the city**, focusing on measures that we have only the chance now to get right. We will give priority to important services and functions of which the City Council is the only provider.

Alongside this, by applying new thinking and creativity, we will intensify our ongoing **programme of savings** from efficiency which has so benefited both council taxpayers and service recipients to date.

Our commitment to **fairness in Cambridge** is undiminished. Our eyes are set firmly on the future prosperity of the city shared by all, which must be secured by enabling and attracting **new jobs and housing** through our planning policies.

In a growing city, we will maintain our insistence on the provision of **affordable homes** and homes for families and in locations close to public transport.

In meeting today's needs, we will drive for environmentally **sustainable solutions** which are fair both to future generations of Cambridge and to more precarious existences elsewhere in the world, all of us faced by climate change.

And finally, our fair deal for Cambridge means honouring our commitment to **transparent and accessible local politics** and maximising direct local input into local choices.

Our city is shaped by many forces. But as the democratic forum for the whole community, the City Council is central to supplying leadership.

So what is our **Liberal Democrat** vision for Cambridge which drives us in providing this leadership?

A city which is diverse and tolerant, values activities which bring people together and offers a stake in the community for all

Cambridge is a strong and vibrant city. In a recent independent survey* 86% of local people said they felt that those from different backgrounds get on well together here - 10% more than the national average. That is a good start, but we believe we can do more. So what are Liberal Democrats running the City Council doing to reinforce the openness and cohesiveness of our community?

- Running community centres across the city where residents of all ages can engage in social activities, and establishing with partners a programme of activities to address the needs of young and old in the city centre

- Supporting free cultural events, such as Arbury Carnival, Chesterton Festival, Cambridgeshire Celebrates Age, Black History and LGBT Months, Holocaust Memorial Day, Heart of the World Festival, the Big Weekend and Bonfire Night

- Involving children and young people in play and youth provision through community centres, schools and on open spaces, targeting activities to support them making choices and enhancing awareness and respect for their neighbourhoods and the natural environment

A city which recognises and meets needs for housing of all kinds - close to jobs and neighbourhood facilities

Cambridge has become a magnet for jobs, but without local homes we will see more long distance commuting and young people finding it hard to get a place of their own. For the city's success to be sustainable, the Lib Dem City Council is striving to enable the development of new homes in communities people can be proud both to be members and neighbours of. We have supported building 12,500 new homes in the City Council area; the 4,300 built so far are on brownfield land. We will continue to:

- Maintain ambitious requirements for most new developments to include 40% housing for social rent and low cost equity purchase

- Allow building on locations adjacent to the city and close to jobs.

- Insist on real neighbourhoods with a vibrant mix of housing and a full range of community facilities and generous open space in similar proportion to the best provision in the existing city

- Resist higher government targets than we are already working towards and taking more land out of the green belt

A city which possesses a 'sense of place' in all of its parts, defined by generous urban open spaces characterised by well designed buildings, and drawing inspiration from its iconic historic centre

Though the city will continue to change, as it always has, Liberal Democrats on the City Council are committed to nurture its timeless tradition of fine architecture, conservation and open space both in what we have already and what is new. In pursuit of this we will:

- Stay committed to high design standards and encourage developments such as the prizewinning Accordia, by putting strong design disciplines up front in the planning process and by using advisory panels such as the Design & Conservation Panel, the Public Art Panel and the Quality Panel for new neighbourhoods

- Continue our proactive conservation work with new area assessments, including the Mill Road and St Matthews area, combined with Romsey, and West Cambridge

- Re-invigorate the public realm with improvement schemes, such as those planned for Riverside, Fitzroy and Burleigh Streets, Wulfstan Way and Arbury Court

- Pursue ambitious plans for augmenting the city's public open spaces, ensuring that the new developments share the best standards of Cambridge

- Invest in our nature reserves to improve bio-diversity and supplement the one-for-one replacement of diseased trees on public open space with a major additional investment in new tree planting on Midsummer Common and Jesus Green

A city where getting around is primarily by public transport, bike and on foot

While transport is chiefly a County Council responsibility, the Liberal Democrat-run City Council continues to consistently spearhead the case for a major new transport strategy. Its absence is another constraint on Cambridge being able to grow sustainably. We will:

- Continue to press for major public investment facilitating public transport, cycling and walking, recognising the need to stem the growth of private vehicles within the city and reduce transport related carbon emissions

- Act to win interim resources, such as through the recent Cycling Demonstration Town status, enabling schemes like The Tins, New Bit and Madingley Road cycle paths

- Expand the Car Club, helping to make car ownership less necessary

- Campaign for a new approach to bus access to the city centre which is safer for walkers and cyclists and more friendly to the environment

- Press the County Council to work more closely now with the City Council to find transport solutions to meet the growth of jobs and homes in Cambridge

A city in the forefront of low carbon living and minimising its impact on the environment from waste and pollution

Cambridge, informed by its scientists and innovators, is at the forefront of international thinking on the climate; the City Council is equally at the forefront of local government practice in reducing Cambridge's carbon footprint and in adapting to climate change. This is evidenced by our groundbreaking success in securing energy standards for 3000 new homes on our major growth site in North West Cambridge, requiring them to have zero carbon emission heating, hot water and lighting. We will

- Press ahead with new energy policies through our Decarbonising Cambridge study for our next local plan, and with innovative policies on sustainable construction and drainage which we have recently published

- Pursue our ambitious Climate Change Strategy within the Council's own operations, striving to meet our commitment to the 10/10 Campaign by continuing to cut our carbon footprint through a travel and fleet management plan, the use of green electricity, and energy management – including installation of LED lighting into the Grand Arcade Annexe car park

- Develop our outreach under the Cambridge Climate Charter, launched with key employers, now providing workshops on green procurement; and maintain our backing for innovative routes to sustainability driven by community organisations such as Cambridge Carbon Footprint, Close the Door and Transition Cambridge

- Building on the new blue bin scheme, aim to break through the 45% recycling rate barrier, supported by the inclusion of half the remaining blocks of flats into the recycling service, the introduction of fluorescent light bulbs recycling and the expansion of battery recycling across the city, and extending blue bins to more businesses

- Develop a new annual city target for overall waste reduction, to couple rising recycling rates with

absolute reductions in waste to landfill per head of population, and support it by working with local retailers and for public awareness as well as campaigning nationally for legislation

A city whose destiny as a global hub of ideas and learning is at the core of a thriving knowledge-based economy benefitting the whole community

We want Cambridge to continue to develop as a centre of excellence and world leader in the fields of higher education and research and we want to foster the large economy which has spun off from it, been attracted by it or is dependent on it. We look for ways the broader community can benefit from this exceptional presence in our midst.

- We will enable the growth of jobs as we have with the expansion of the Addenbrookes site which will create 9000 jobs in the bio-medical sector

- We will enable the growth of the higher education sector in Cambridge through our planning policies, while expecting the universities to set exemplary design and sustainability standards

- We will tap into university research for ideas on city development such as in transport, art, low energy technologies, criminology and architecture, as we are doing on a project to retrofit insulation in certain Council houses

- We will actively seek partnership with the universities on broader community objectives, recognising their large role as landowners, and with their student representative bodies to discuss issues of mutual concern

A city whose citizens feel they can influence public decision making and are equally keen to pursue individual and community initiatives

Already the indications are that Cambridge does well with this and the Lib Dem City Council is proud of its share in that. A full 10% more people than the national average* feel they can influence local decisions here. Significantly more people here say they participate in regular volunteering than the national average. But there is still scope to improve - and it would be great to become a national example. To encourage this, the Liberal Democrats will:

- Continue to engage with a range of stakeholder groups, including residents' associations and children and young people, to gain feedback from and inform Council decisions, as we do in relation to the management of open spaces and swimming pools

- Build on our Area Committees as the prime vehicle for taking local decision making to people, by involving them in setting priorities for Street Scene, Open Spaces and Community Development, finding ways for children and young people to get involved in decision making processes

- Develop a Code of best practice on Consultation, establishing a more consistent approach across the Council in seeking and utilising public input into decision making

- Continue to make grants to stimulate voluntary community action across a wide range of priorities from social enterprise to community development

A city where behaviour is characterised by consideration for others, with harm and nuisance confronted wherever possible without constraining the lives of all

A significantly lower proportion of people in Cambridge than nationally see problems with the respect and consideration people extend to each other*. Fewer people here than the national average see anti-social behaviour as a problem and more think the police and other local services are successfully dealing with concerns about it. This provides an encouraging context, but obviously problems still arise and Liberal

Democrats leading the City Council remain alert and will:

- Continue to work in close partnership with the Police, sanctioning and withdrawing special Police powers sparingly and in strict response to hard evidence of incidents and avoiding measures likely to limit innocent behaviour
- Encourage greater transparency, public debate and scrutiny on Policing priorities
- Review and update Bye-laws relating to Parks and Open Spaces
- Work in partnership with the County Council, police, health and voluntary organisations to address the causes of anti-social behaviour in children and young people, often linked to deprivation and disaffection.

This is who we are and what we are about. Our progress and speed on this journey is determined by the scope of the powers we have in each field, the resources at our disposal and the co-operation of others with whom we need to work.

Under the Liberal Democrats, the City Council itself will continue to:

Have a presumption of openness on all possible occasions

Having campaigned for years against secrecy, Liberal Democrats are proud of the standard they have set since controlling the City Council. It means you see and hear "the warts and all" – but this is the essence of accountability. We will continue to put as much of the Council's work as we logically can into the public domain. For the future we propose to:

- Further develop the Council's website to enable information to be more easily accessed, including planning applications
- Proactively put as much information as possible about the Council onto its website making formal Freedom of Information Requests a last resort
- To put the Council's responses to individual requests under the Freedom of Information Act onto the Council's website for everyone to see
- To insist that the various partnership bodies in which the City Council participates to adopt our code of open meetings, public questions and published agendas and minutes

Maximise the accessibility and responsiveness of its services

With the developing cross-departmental Customer Service Centre in Regent Street, we are making the Council much easier to do business with. According to the Council's independent survey**, last year nearly 90% felt it was easy to contact the Council if they needed to, and satisfaction with the way queries were handled rose from 74 to 78%. But we continue to strive for more:

- Moving the Centre still closer to a 'one-stop shop' with the integration of Environment & Planning and Tenancy & Housing Management

- Even better response times both on the phone and for visits in person and ongoing development of email and website communications to ensure we meet the increasing aspiration for electronic contact
- A refocused “Cambridge Matters” magazine to inform and facilitate two-way communication about all aspects of the Council’s services

Seek value for the public money it spends

Under us, the City Council has conducted ongoing service-by-service efficiency reviews, which have saved at least £6m of annual spending over the past 6 years alone by smarter, leaner service delivery. This has enabled us to afford service improvements and absorb financial shocks outside our control without resorting to sudden surprise claims on Council Tax payers. For the last 3 years of the common evaluation of councils’ use of resources by the Audit Commission, Cambridge was ranked in the top 5% nationally and people locally rated us best in the county for value for money*. We plan to:

- Continue our review of services, looking next at the way we provide Arts and Entertainment including the operation of the Corn Exchange
- Pursue further opportunities for savings by looking at joint commisioning of services where appropriate, as we did successfully with the joint recycling contract associated with the new blue bin scheme
- Further develop the economies of scale offered by the Customer Service centre in taking routine enquiries to free up other professional staff to focus on their other work
- In consultation with the community, spend funds negotiated from developers to improve Cambridge and mitigate the impact of growth, for example in public art, cycleways, the public realm and open spaces

Strive for excellence through innovation and readiness to learn from experience

Under our leadership the City Council has pioneered successful ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking in the interests of residents, such as its scheme to fit lights for cyclists caught without them in return for their penalty, and its leadership of ‘Changing Spaces’ to enable art displays in empty shop windows during the recession. We have also been ready to learn when the unexpected has happened. We will:

- Continue to seek ‘right first time’ decisions with our approach of involving councillors of all parties in making them
- Pursue the suggestions we made for innovation at the recent invitation of the Government, which have been selected for further study: retention of council house revenues to build new sustainable housing, and the removal of obstacles to the introduction of renewable energy schemes
- Build on our redeployment of City Council staff from other duties to help the poorly prepared County Council clear last winter’s heavy snowfall by working with it to secure better attention to main pedestrian and cycling routes and to enable more self help by providing access to a supply of grit
- Recognise and carefully learn from experience when things go wrong as we did following the failure of the agency selling Folk Festival tickets on-line
- Continue to Implement robust and strengthened safeguards arising from the collapse of the Icelandic Banks

Speak out for Cambridge in order to make a difference

As local government is much too constrained by control from Whitehall, Liberal Democrats see part of our role in leading the Council as lobbying for the city's interests outside. We did this in our campaign against the Government's short change for delivery of Concessionary Bus Fares, which has steadily eaten into overall Council finances – and, late in the day, has been only partly redressed. Neither have we been afraid to stand up to the County Council, when it has been unresponsive to the city's needs. Liberal Democrats will continue to:

- Press the County Council to implement meaningful controls on the bus fleet to improve air quality in the city centre
- Campaign for the Government to restore a fair level of housing allowance for the residents of Cambridge
- Seek local authority powers to encourage competition in the local market and shape an environment in which independent businesses can thrive
- Campaign to defend the local economy from government cutbacks in higher education and their impact on student access and educational quality

Seek ultimately to form the core of an all-purpose, single tier authority, providing full local government by Cambridge for Cambridge

It is clear to Liberal Democrats, as it is to the public, that Cambridge, is significant enough to need a single integrated local authority. The complexity of the pressures for growth and the endemic political mis-alignment between City and County are crying out to be resolved around one table. We will work to create the right environment for the success of this proposition, locally and nationally. We seek the urgent establishment of an Integrated Transport Authority enabling a joined-up approach to transport into and within the city.

April 2010

* Place Survey 2008 – CELLO mruk research – Government prescribed questions across the country

** Citizen Survey 2009 – CELLO mruk research – Conducted to gather feedback on experiences of Council services